

Office of Attorney General Terry Goddard



STATE OF ARIZONA
DEPARTMENT OF LAW
12 75 W. WASHINGTON STREET
PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85007-2926
WWW.AZAG.GOV

ANDREA M. ESQUER
PRESS SECRETARY
PHONE: (602) 542-8019
CELL PHONE: (602) 725-2200

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**** Consumer Advisory ****

Terry Goddard Announces Free Service To Check for Used Cars Damaged by Hurricanes

(Phoenix, Ariz. – Nov. 7, 2005) Attorney General Terry Goddard today announced a free service that allows consumers to check a VIN number of a used car to determine if the vehicle was damaged during Hurricanes Katrina or Rita. The service is offered by the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB), a non-profit group that works with insurers, law enforcement and the public to fight insurance fraud and vehicle theft.

After insurance claims have been processed, titles for storm-damaged cars are usually branded "totaled" or "flooded." But unscrupulous parties may complete minor repairs and send the cars to other states to try to sell them under a normal status title.

"This is a great service for Arizona consumers," Goddard said. "Nationally, as many as 500,000 automobiles were severely damaged during the hurricanes. Some of these cars may have been repaired only cosmetically, then offered for sale in Arizona without any mention of storm damage."

NICB is assembling a registry of vehicles damaged by floods and high winds during the hurricanes. Consumers are advised to check this registry when purchasing a used car in the months ahead. NICB has already registered 165,000 vehicles. The list is compiled with information from insurance companies, state and local governments and salvage yards.

"Checking this registry can keep consumers from buying damaged cars that could require costly repairs and could be dangerous to drive," Goddard said. "Even if the car doesn't show up on the NICB registry, it is important for consumers to thoroughly check out the car history before purchasing. The best thing consumers can do is take the car to a trusted mechanic. Never buy from someone who won't let you take the car to have it inspected."

Tips for Detecting Flood-Damaged Vehicles

Here are some consumer tips when looking for flood damage:

- Check inside the trunk for signs of moisture, silt or corrosion. Make sure to check around the spare tire.
- Check the engine for signs of moisture damage, such as rust or silt or grass.
- Give the vehicle a smell test - inside and out - if it smells musty, it could be flood-damaged.
- Examine the underside of the vehicle for signs of excess moisture.
- Check inside dome lights, glove boxes and other places where water might have been trapped for signs of moisture, mold, rust or silt.
- Check the interior for signs of mismatched items such as carpeting or seat covers.
- Test all electrical components, including lights, signals, switches and audio system.

NICB receives support from approximately 1,000 property/casualty insurance companies. Arizona consumers can link to the NICB registry from the Attorney General's Office Web site at www.azag.gov. Click on the "Consumers" link where the NICB information can be found.

If you believe you have unknowingly purchased a hurricane-damaged vehicle, please contact the Attorney General's Office in Phoenix at 602.542.5763; in Tucson at 520.628.6504; or outside the metro areas at 1.800.352.8431. Consumers can also file complaints online by visiting www.azag.gov.

###